



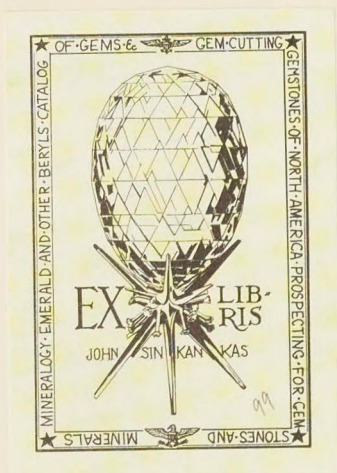
The Quest
of the
Yellow Pearl

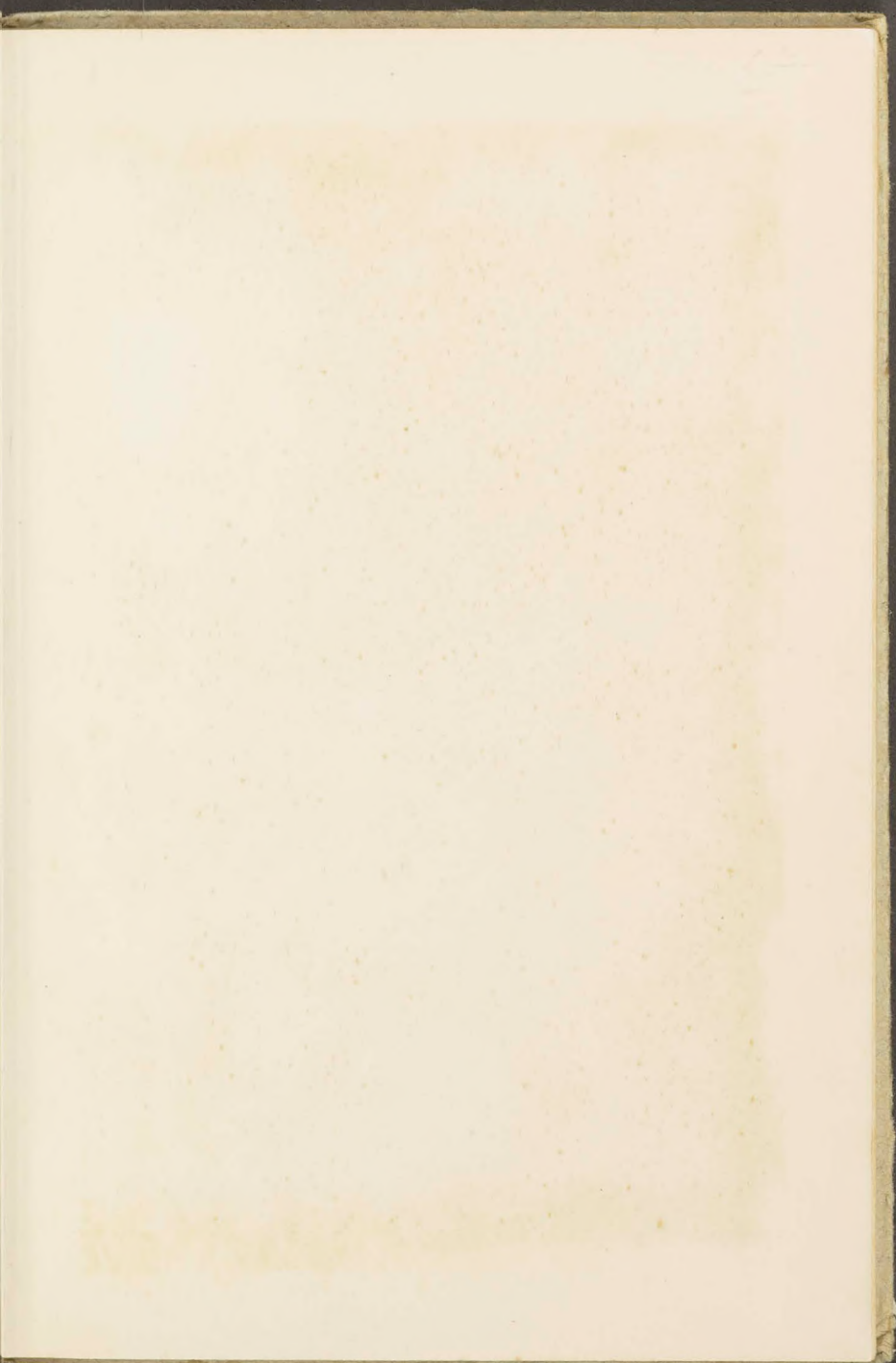
by
M. C. Macfarlane

10/20/96

Fiction

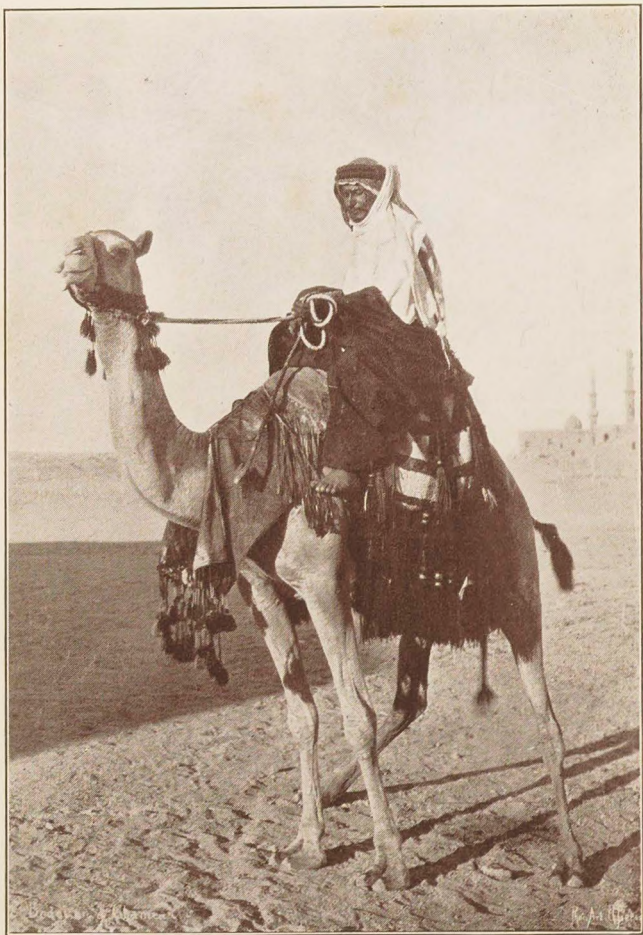
PEARL







THE QUEST
of The
YELLOW PEARL



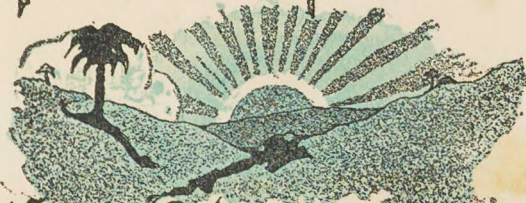
"Eldad ben Jacob journeyed thousands of miles."

SIAKANKAS
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The Quest
of the
Yellow Pearl
by

D. C. MacFarlane



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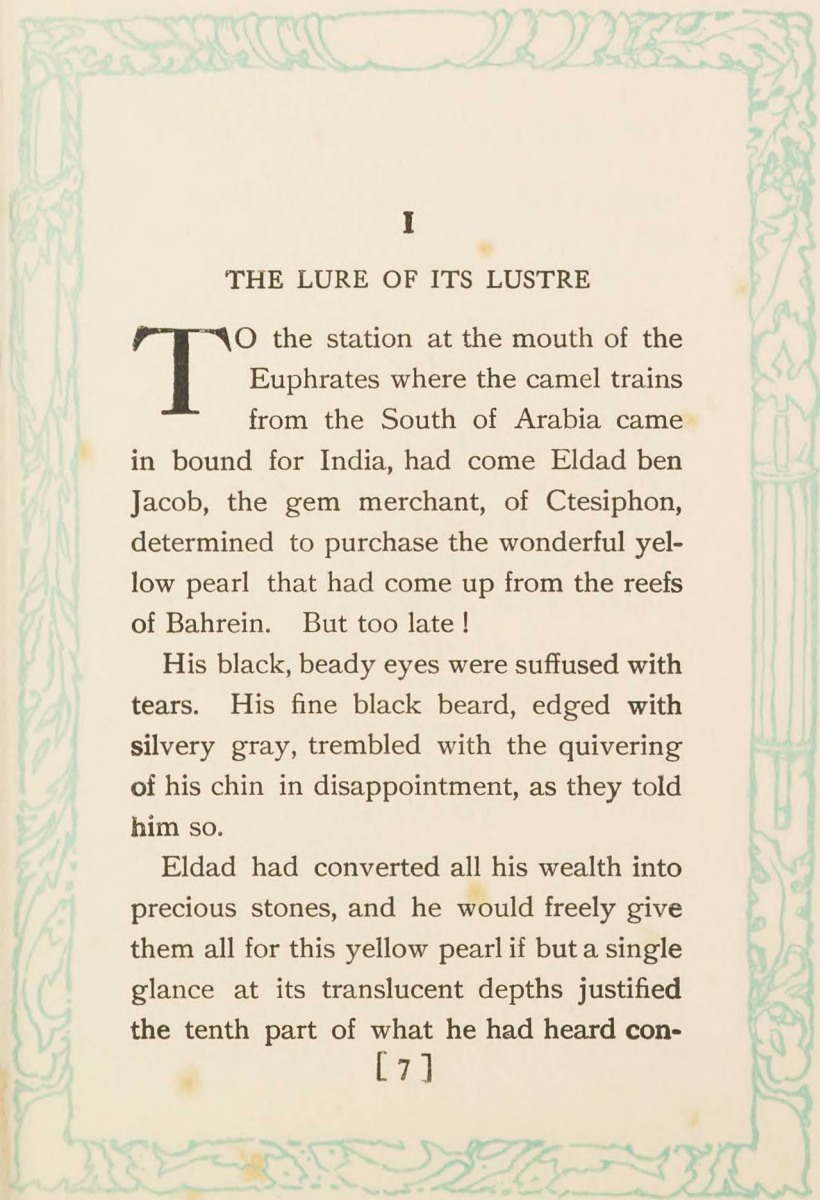
I. *The Lure of Its Lustre* . 7

II. *Paying the Price* . . 23

III. *To Him that Hath* . 35







I

THE LURE OF ITS LUSTRE

TO the station at the mouth of the Euphrates where the camel trains from the South of Arabia came in bound for India, had come Eldad ben Jacob, the gem merchant, of Ctesiphon, determined to purchase the wonderful yellow pearl that had come up from the reefs of Bahrein. But too late!

His black, beady eyes were suffused with tears. His fine black beard, edged with silvery gray, trembled with the quivering of his chin in disappointment, as they told him so.

Eldad had converted all his wealth into precious stones, and he would freely give them all for this yellow pearl if but a single glance at its translucent depths justified the tenth part of what he had heard con-

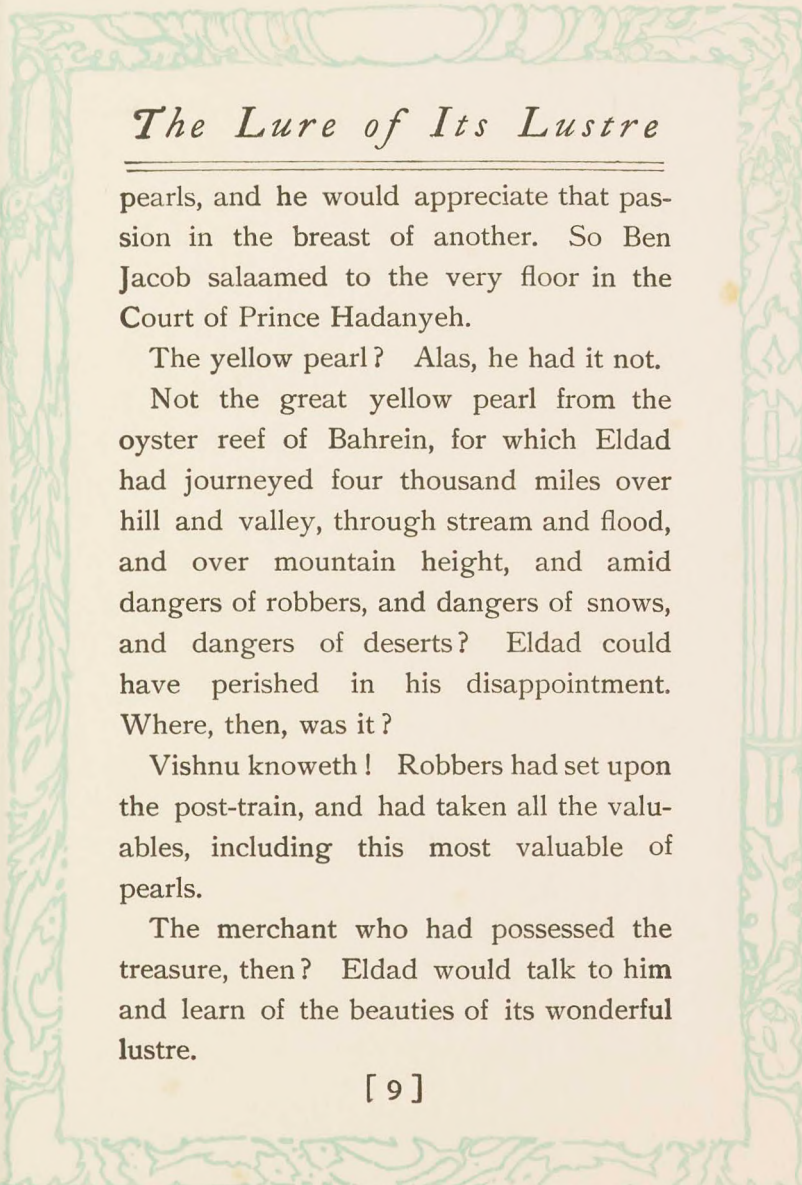
The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

cerning its size and beauty. Where, then, had it gone?

To India, for Prince Hadanyeh.

Prince Hadanyeh! Eldad knew him well. To him he had sold a wondrous, pink, pear-shaped pearl. Hadanyeh was a true lover of the gem. Still, he could not possibly love this yellow pearl as Eldad would love it; nay, as he loved it already; so Eldad would follow the merchant. A handful of his smaller pearls would get him fast horses. He would overtake him within a fortnight. But, "No," they told him. The merchant had fallen in with a post-train, bearing dispatches, and they would travel early and late, and Eldad, far from overtaking them, would not be able to go so swiftly.

Months later, weary and travel sore, Eldad entered the City of Calcutta. Would Hadanyeh sell the jewel? Perhaps. Perhaps not. But he was a true lover of



The Lure of Its Lustre

pearls, and he would appreciate that passion in the breast of another. So Ben Jacob salaamed to the very floor in the Court of Prince Hadanyeh.

The yellow pearl? Alas, he had it not.

Not the great yellow pearl from the oyster reef of Bahrein, for which Eldad had journeyed four thousand miles over hill and valley, through stream and flood, and over mountain height, and amid dangers of robbers, and dangers of snows, and dangers of deserts? Eldad could have perished in his disappointment. Where, then, was it?

Vishnu knoweth! Robbers had set upon the post-train, and had taken all the valuables, including this most valuable of pearls.

The merchant who had possessed the treasure, then? Eldad would talk to him and learn of the beauties of its wonderful lustre.

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

Prince Hadanyeh was truly sorry, but the merchant was no more. The Prince had regretfully felt compelled to behead him for his carelessness in losing the yellow pearl. Something Hadanyeh could tell him though of its characteristics. It was large, large as a,—well, not so large as a pomegranate, but it was very large, so large that it was wonderful how any oyster could have harboured it within its shell. But because of its very largeness it was something irregular in size.

Irregular? It was not, then, a perfect gem?

Perfect? Yes ; for in its very irregularity it was perfect, since it took the exact form of a heart, a human heart.

Its texture?

It was smooth at the touch, but in reality, while the texture was fine, there were infinitesimal undulations on its surface and these, of course, enhanced its lustre.

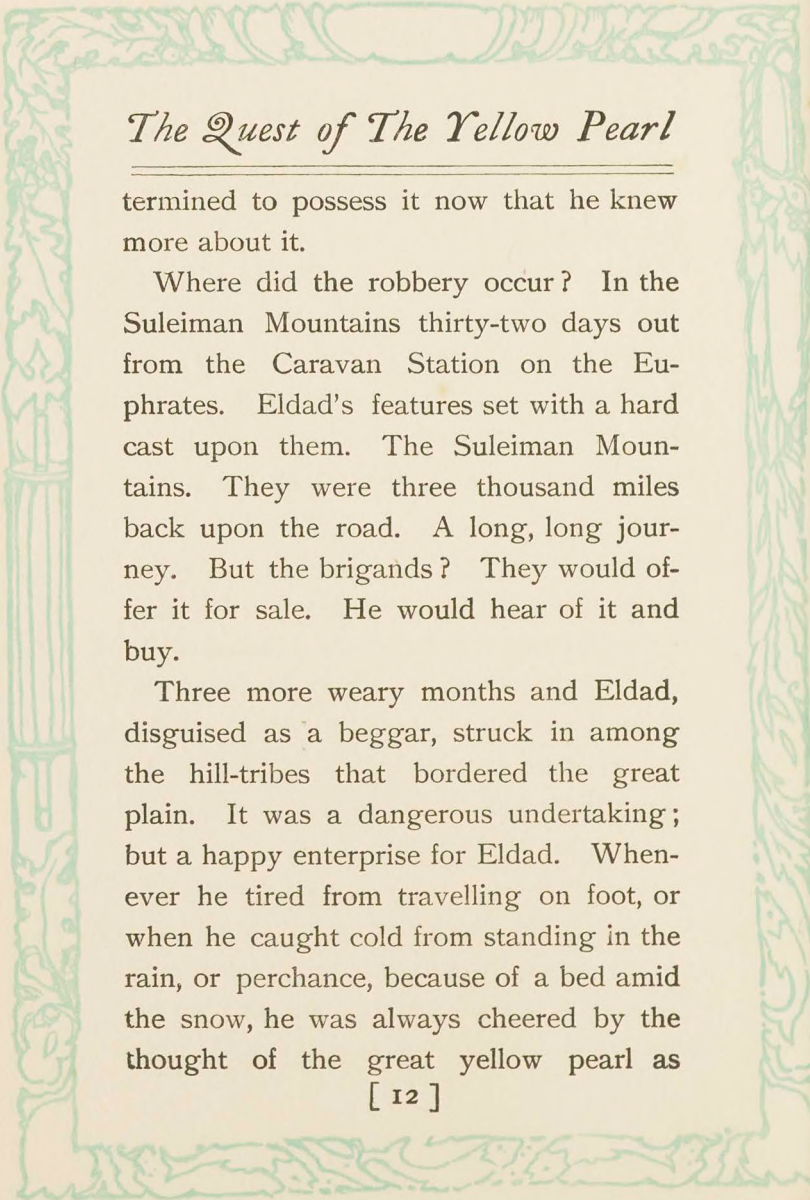
The Lure of Its Lustre

And the colour was yellow—a consistent, creamy yellow?

A yellow; yes; but not consistent. The lobes of the heart were creamy yellow, but, strange to say, the tip was blood red, and in the shading into yellow there appeared a transparent band that was almost white, and of the finest watering.

Oh, ravishing — wondrously, — ravishingly,—transportingly beautiful! Eldad's eyes blazed. His face was kindled with joy. He rejoiced in Prince Hadanyeh's description of it. These two connoisseurs had pleasure in each other's appreciation of the pearl and their imaginations outdid one another in describing it.

Hadanyeh was a great prince. Eldad had always known it. Quite right of him to put to death the stupid merchant who had permitted himself to be despoiled of the pearl. But Eldad was the more de-



The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

terminated to possess it now that he knew more about it.

Where did the robbery occur? In the Suleiman Mountains thirty-two days out from the Caravan Station on the Euphrates. Eldad's features set with a hard cast upon them. The Suleiman Mountains. They were three thousand miles back upon the road. A long, long journey. But the brigands? They would offer it for sale. He would hear of it and buy.

Three more weary months and Eldad, disguised as a beggar, struck in among the hill-tribes that bordered the great plain. It was a dangerous undertaking; but a happy enterprise for Eldad. Whenever he tired from travelling on foot, or when he caught cold from standing in the rain, or perchance, because of a bed amid the snow, he was always cheered by the thought of the great yellow pearl as

The Lure of Its Lustre

Hadanyeh had pictured it to his admiring imagination—the sheen of the yellow, the glint of the flecks of gold and white, the rich deep lustre of the crimson and pink ! Was there ever such a pearl ? And the size of it ! Not so large as a pomegranate, but, large—large ! large !

And for the very joy and the hope of it, years slipped by amid these hill-tribes as one season might have gone. But at last he traced the pearl into the hands of a half-wild Bactrian chief far to the North, and questioned him eagerly.

The pearl ? Yes, he had it. It was indeed all that had been said about it, save for its colour. Yellow ? No, it was not yellow ; it was red—blood red.

How marvellous ! Eldad had never heard of a blood red pearl. Were there any such ?

This one was, certainly.

This might have been a disappointment,

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

since Ben Jacob's greatest passion was for golden pearls ; but not now. *Now* his passion was for this pearl—this great, heart-shaped pearl, and yellow, or white, or red, he was determined to have it.

Red, then, was it? And might he be permitted to look upon it?

The Chief was sorry to disappoint him, but he sent it three months before as a present to his Sovereign, Onones, the King of Parthia. It was a trinket too valuable for the savage world in which it had come to rest.

Onones, the King of Parthia! Now, Eldad began to feel at ease concerning the pearl. Onones! He knew him well. He had trafficked with him in precious stones before, and the Parthian cared most for diamonds, more for diamonds than for pearls. And Eldad could get him the rarest diamonds in the world, a whole tiaraful if necessary, but what he would persuade

The Lure of Its Lustre

him to sell the heart-shaped, heart-red pearl.

So Eldad ben Jacob took him a quiet month in which to rest from his journeys and groom himself once more, and in due course he set out upon a two-humped Bactrian camel for the palace of the King of Parthia.

But, tears for the King of Parthia ! He had so far forgotten himself as to engage in a war with Rome, and Publius Martius had conquered and dragged Onones at his chariot wheel. The victorious general had filled his coffers with the spoils of the Parthian Palace, and with them had gone a great pendant of gold, in the centre of which was a wondrous vari-coloured pearl.

"Vari-coloured?" questioned Eldad, of those who related the sad news.

Yes, since some who had seen it declared that it was yellow, yellow as the cream on the milk of the sacred camel :

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

while others averred that when it came from the hill-tribes it was red, red as blood.

Fortune gave Eldad a quick journey to Rome. He arrived on the day that the Senate awarded the victorious general a triumph. He saw the long procession, Martius standing proudly in his chariot, and his unfortunate friend, the King of Parthia, lashed behind.

That very night Eldad was using some of his stock of pearls to buy his way through the Prætorian lines and into the Mammertine prison where he talked face to face with poor Onones.

The pearl? Yes, it was a marvellous gem, and it had a marvellous history. When found it was yellow, yellow as gold, and its creamy iridescence was of a richness and subtle depth of shading that made it more beautiful than any man had ever looked upon before. But its beauty was fatal. It excited the cupidity of the diver's

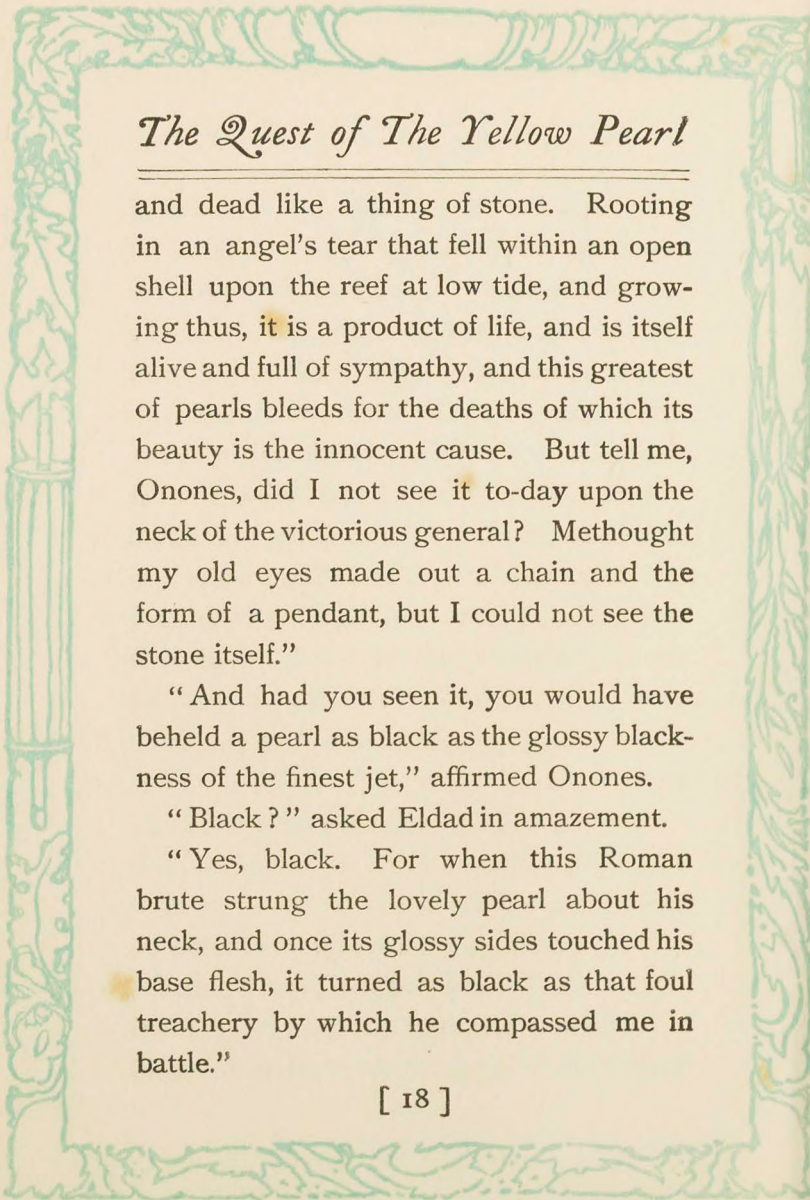
The 'Lure of Its Lustre

comrades, so they knifed him and flung him overboard, taking the yellow pearl for their own. That night a touch of red, bloody red, appeared upon the tip of the heart. The murderers were afraid and sold it quickly to the Indian merchant who designed it for Prince Hadanyeh, but the hill-men stole it, and everywhere it went it was the sign of blood and strife, and so its iridescent yellow sheen was more and more suffused with crimson until, when it reached the Parthian King, it was red, red as if it had been produced in a human heart of warm blood instead of the cold raw shell of an oyster.

But did it lose its lustre with the coming of the red? No, it took on more, if that were possible.

"How strange that it should change its colour thus!" mused the captive King.

"No, not strange," declared the pearl lover with feeling. "A pearl is not cold



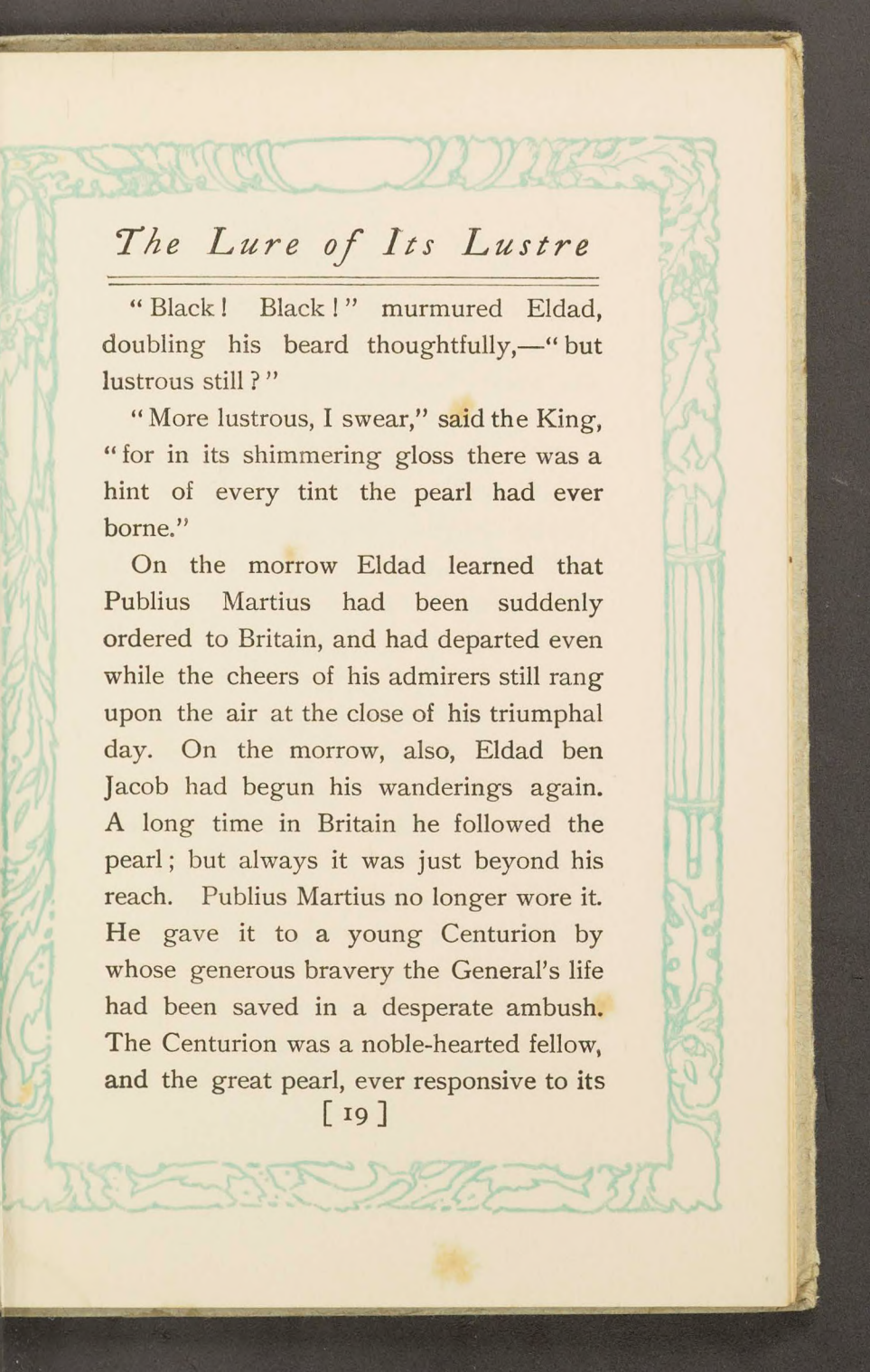
The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

and dead like a thing of stone. Rooting in an angel's tear that fell within an open shell upon the reef at low tide, and growing thus, it is a product of life, and is itself alive and full of sympathy, and this greatest of pearls bleeds for the deaths of which its beauty is the innocent cause. But tell me, Onones, did I not see it to-day upon the neck of the victorious general? Methought my old eyes made out a chain and the form of a pendant, but I could not see the stone itself."

"And had you seen it, you would have beheld a pearl as black as the glossy blackness of the finest jet," affirmed Onones.

"Black?" asked Eldad in amazement.

"Yes, black. For when this Roman brute strung the lovely pearl about his neck, and once its glossy sides touched his base flesh, it turned as black as that foul treachery by which he compassed me in battle."



The Lure of Its Lustre

“Black! Black!” murmured Eldad, doubling his beard thoughtfully,—“but lustrous still?”

“More lustrous, I swear,” said the King, “for in its shimmering gloss there was a hint of every tint the pearl had ever borne.”

On the morrow Eldad learned that Publius Martius had been suddenly ordered to Britain, and had departed even while the cheers of his admirers still rang upon the air at the close of his triumphal day. On the morrow, also, Eldad ben Jacob had begun his wanderings again. A long time in Britain he followed the pearl; but always it was just beyond his reach. Publius Martius no longer wore it. He gave it to a young Centurion by whose generous bravery the General's life had been saved in a desperate ambush. The Centurion was a noble-hearted fellow, and the great pearl, ever responsive to its

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

environment, began to lose its funereal cast, and when last Eldad heard from it direct, the great, heart-shaped, luminous jewel was a leaden, feathery gray in colouring, and bore a silvery sheen with rapturous hints of every hue in the calendar of nature. But the Centurion was transferred to Gaul and then to Rome, and thither Eldad, an old man, journeyed on. He had begun to lose hope.

In Rome he talked to the Centurion.

The pearl? In truth, yes. But he had pawned it with an old Jew, a money-lender, and the rascal had gone away with it, he knew not whither—to Antioch, some said—but if ever he, the Centurion, should lay eyes upon him, he would have that pearl if—and the stern soldier's eyes snapped ominously.

Wearily, as having nothing else in life to engage his time, but somewhat hopelessly, Eldad ben Jacob drifted around the

The Lure of Its Lustre

Mediterranean from port to port, and city to city, at last in final desperation, taking ship for Antioch in Syria.

He had the name of the money-lender—Jason; Jason the Jew? Yes, everybody knew him, but he had died abroad, and of his personal property none were informed.

At last had come the final blow to all his hopes, which, long foreseen, yet fell with stunning force. It was on a sunny afternoon in Seleucia, the port of Antioch, that Eldad gave up his quest. He took his way out to the seaside, and sat a long time by the waves, and as they rolled in upon the sands, they sounded like muffled drums beating the sad funereal march of despair through the gloomy chambers of his darkened soul. With a sigh, he gave it up.

And then, musingly, as by long habit, he loosed an end of his girdle, and there **ran out** into his hand a stream of goodly

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

pearls of many sizes, rare and wonderful. He had saved them for the purchase price of the great golden pearl, and now it was no longer golden, but leaden gray, and lost, and so was his life leaden gray, and —lost.

But he loved the pearls and poured them through his fingers, and the sun's rays played upon them, glancing off in fascinating streamlets of glistening, bird-of-paradise, flickering lights, lambent in their playfulness.

Something of the old enthusiasm kindled on his face, but faded quickly as, with a start, Eldad saw that he was being spied upon by a man as old as himself.

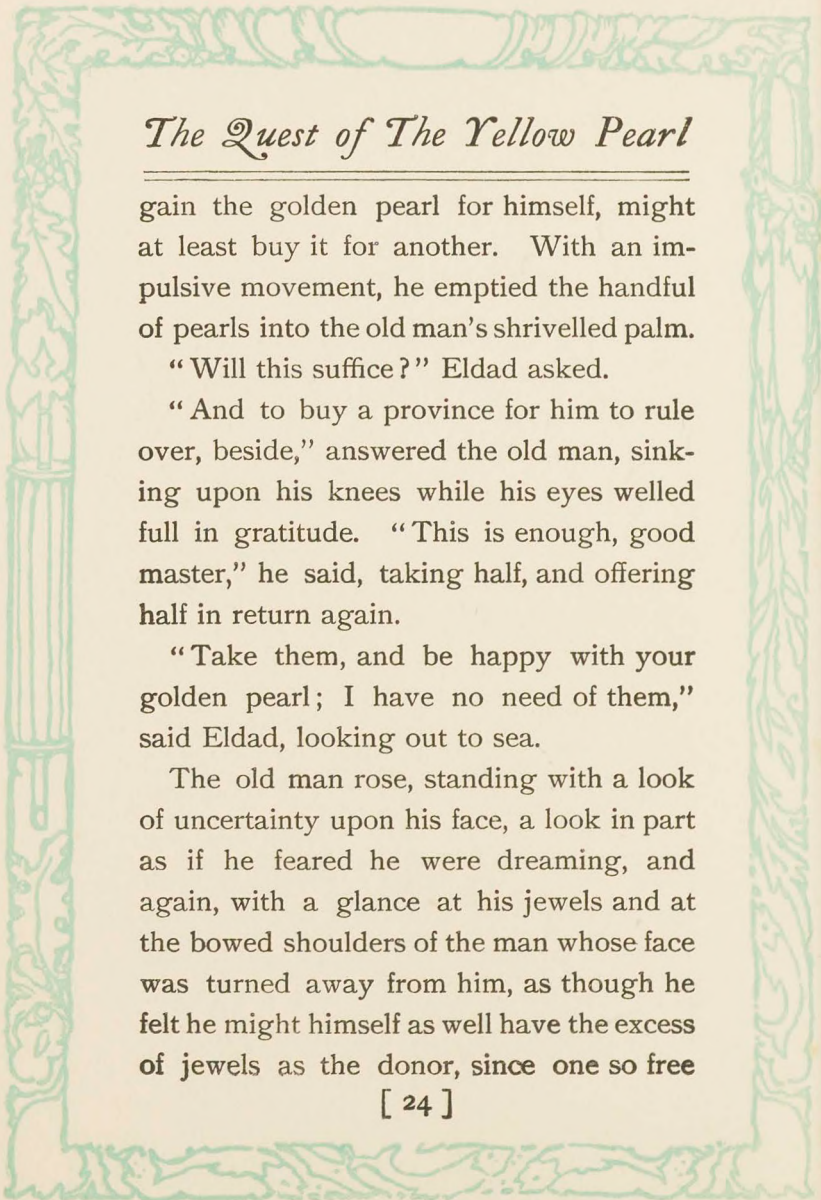


II

PAYING THE PRICE

“O H, sir !” exclaimed the old man, as soon as he knew himself observed ; “ you are rich, and I am poor. My son is condemned to die, or pay a very large price, a king’s ransom, and I have no money. Your hand is full of pearls. My son is my pearl. Indeed, his life has been as a golden pearl unto me, and now it is going.”

The old man said no more. He merely looked his grief unutterable, and his pleading, silent, unspoken, but eloquent beyond the power of words, tugged at the pearl merchant’s heart. Eldad, indeed, had started as if wounded, at the words “ golden pearl.” His golden pearl was gone forever. The old man’s son might be restored to him. He who had failed to



The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

gain the golden pearl for himself, might at least buy it for another. With an impulsive movement, he emptied the handful of pearls into the old man's shrivelled palm.

"Will this suffice?" Eldad asked.

"And to buy a province for him to rule over, beside," answered the old man, sinking upon his knees while his eyes welled full in gratitude. "This is enough, good master," he said, taking half, and offering half in return again.

"Take them, and be happy with your golden pearl; I have no need of them," said Eldad, looking out to sea.

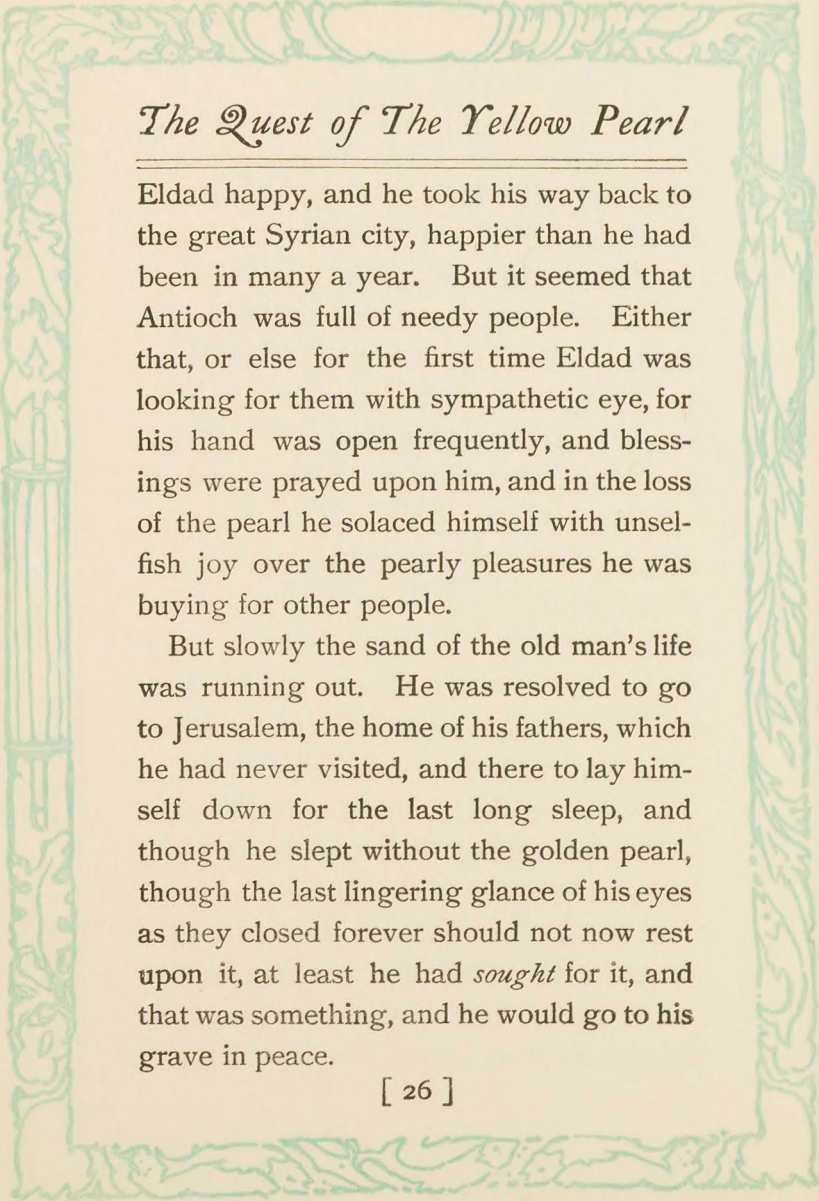
The old man rose, standing with a look of uncertainty upon his face, a look in part as if he feared he were dreaming, and again, with a glance at his jewels and at the bowed shoulders of the man whose face was turned away from him, as though he felt he might himself as well have the excess of jewels as the donor, since one so free

Paying the Price

with them would soon part with his riches anyway. Then he spoke again.

"The generous blessings of all the gods endow thee. I would stay to thank thee more, but the need is urgent; the hour of death arrives; I must away." Turning back again he added: "I know not, stranger and benefactor, what God you serve but may he give you yet a better pearl than ever you have dreamed on." So saying, he gathered his cloak under the band of his girdle and with long trembling strides that at times broke almost into a run he started off on the roadway that led through the port and up towards the city of Antioch.

Eldad mused long upon the rock. He mused over the joy in the old man's face; he mused until he seemed to see the young man free, and to hear his shout of youthful joy and behold him clasping his old father to his breast in the happiness of blessed freedom. The thought of it made



The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

Eldad happy, and he took his way back to the great Syrian city, happier than he had been in many a year. But it seemed that Antioch was full of needy people. Either that, or else for the first time Eldad was looking for them with sympathetic eye, for his hand was open frequently, and blessings were prayed upon him, and in the loss of the pearl he solaced himself with unselfish joy over the pearly pleasures he was buying for other people.

But slowly the sand of the old man's life was running out. He was resolved to go to Jerusalem, the home of his fathers, which he had never visited, and there to lay himself down for the last long sleep, and though he slept without the golden pearl, though the last lingering glance of his eyes as they closed forever should not now rest upon it, at least he had *sought* for it, and that was something, and he would go to his grave in peace.

Paying the Price

So he bought a camel once more, and this time a snow white one, as white as his own beard, such a one as should fittingly bear a worn-out pilgrim to the place of his last, long sleep. Wherever, as he journeyed southward, he found want, he relieved it, and with such prodigal hand, that one day to a woman on the way not far from Ptolemais, he tossed his last pearl. And having engaged the woman in conversation, and having asked her more by force of habit than anything else, about the great heart-shaped pearl, she told him that it was owned by a young prophet of Galilee, Jesus by name.

The old man's heart leaped, his nostrils quivered, his chest filled, as with the exhilaration of the hounds when once again they sight the quarry.

Had she seen it? No. But the Prophet had it, that was clear, for once by the lake-side He told the people of it, a very won-

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

derful pearl, so remarkable that a pearl merchant had gone and sold all his pearls and all his jewels, and all his lands, in order to acquire a sum sufficient to possess it, and had journeyed into a far country to buy it. But now the young Prophet had it.

And Eldad? Do you blame him if—was it any wonder that he bowed his head upon his chest and wept? Do not chide him. Eldad was now a very old man. He had given his life to this quest.

The woman looked at him strangely. Eldad felt called upon to explain, concluding with :

“This camel is all I have. To you I have given the last of my pearls, and now I have nothing with which to buy the great pearl.”

“Take back your pearl,” said the woman, sympathetically.

“No ; keep it. It is insufficient.”

Paying the Price

"But, now, I bethink me," said the woman; "the great pearl was not for sale. He was offering to give it away."

"To give it away?"

"Yes, to whoever could rightly discern its beauty, or some such ——"

But Eldad, with an exclamation, had plucked at the nose string and was urging his camel with long strides over the crest of the little hill up which the roadway lifted itself just there.

To the Galilean Sea was but a half day's journey, and the sun had not yet reached the zenith, so at evening Eldad was where the great caravan route from Damascus passed the edge of the lake. There was a custom-house there, and a road turning off to Capernaum. Eldad had just paid the toll that was lawful to a man named Levi, whom he found sitting at the receipt of custom, when his eye which had of late been trained to look for the needy and

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

suffering, fell upon a youth of some fifteen or sixteen years, weeping bitterly.

"Your grief, my son?" the old man asked, sympathetically.

"My father dies in Jericho, and the way is long and he will be dead before I can reach him." The boy was sobbing again, and Eldad's breast held a heart of pity.

"Take my camel, boy, and ride hard," he said. "My journey is but to Capernaum, and while these old legs will not yet bear me long, they will, I venture, sustain me so far on my way ere yet the night comes down."

The boy sank upon his knees, and pressed the hem of Eldad's tunic to his lips, murmuring :

"Oh, good master ; are you the Nazarene, or only one of His disciples?"

Not knowing what the boy meant, the venerable son of Jacob looked to see him safely mounted, and then, staff in hand,

Paying the Price

set off wearily on the road to Capernaum; *wearily*—and yet, his heart was as light as his purse in which one lonely denarius remained to him of all his wealth. But at least he would see the great pearl before his tiring eyes were closed in death. So he mused to the tax-gatherer who, having been relieved for the night, was himself journeying towards Capernaum.

“Of what are you murmuring, old man?” asked Levi, confused.

And Eldad, being an old man, and in need of comfort, told the story of his life, and of his death now approaching, and, of course, of the many-hued pearl which at least he hoped to see ere he died.

“But,” explained Levi, “they who look upon the pearl will not die but have eternal life.”

“Eternal life!” exclaimed the old man, clapping his hands; “then I shall have it, for I will feast my eyes upon it. One told

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

me to-day upon the road that the Prophet wore a golden chaplet upon His head, and pendant in the very centre of His fair, white brow, was the pearl, which was now of a satiny, silvery brightness. Is it not so?"

Levi turned and looked upon the old man curiously. Was he beside himself or not? Or had some one been deceiving the venerable traveller? Jesus of Nazareth spoke often of the pearl of great price, but Levi was sure He wore no jewel and possessed none.

"Is it not so?—that He wears it upon His brow?" persisted Eldad.

Levi would not disappoint him to-night. He looked so worn and ill and tired.

"There sits a kind of radiance upon His brow," he answered evasively, "as though it were the iridescent brightness of a hundred pearls."

"Or of one pearl whose gleaming lustre

Paying the Price

surpassed the combined brightness of a hundred pearls," proposed Eldad ben Jacob.

"Yes," consented Levi.

They were entering the town of Capernaum now, and the wail of a blind man, asking alms, smote upon their ears.

"The night comes on and I have no bed," moaned the beggar.

Eldad paused a moment and looked upon his face as the sightless orbs turned this way and that. Then he took out of his wallet the single denarius, held it between thumb and finger for a fraction of a second, then dropped it into the outstretched hand. Turning to Levi he said, with childish, frank simplicity:

"It is my last. But surely I, with my eyes, may stand a better chance of finding a bed when penniless, than he without his sight shall with a silver denarius."

Levi nodded assent, a look of fine appreciation coming upon his face.

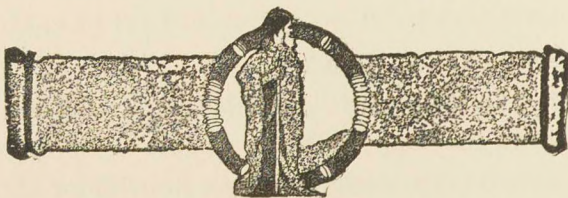
The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

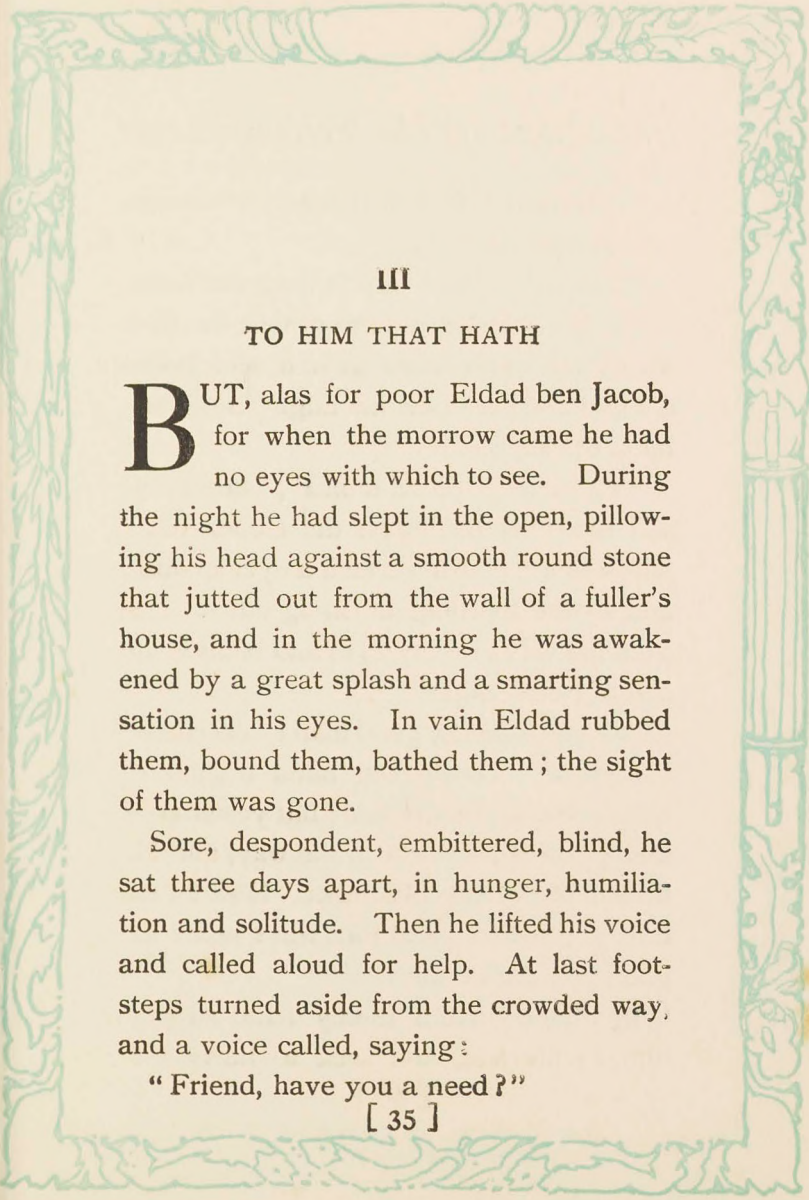
"Old man," he said, heartily, "you may lodge with me."

"Not yet! Not yet!" affirmed Eldad, stoutly. "Never in my life have these limbs stretched themselves upon a bed of charity, and they shall not begin now."

"As you will," said Levi. "Good-night, traveller!"

"Good-night, Publican! To-morrow I shall see the great pearl," he said with a show of fine enthusiasm.





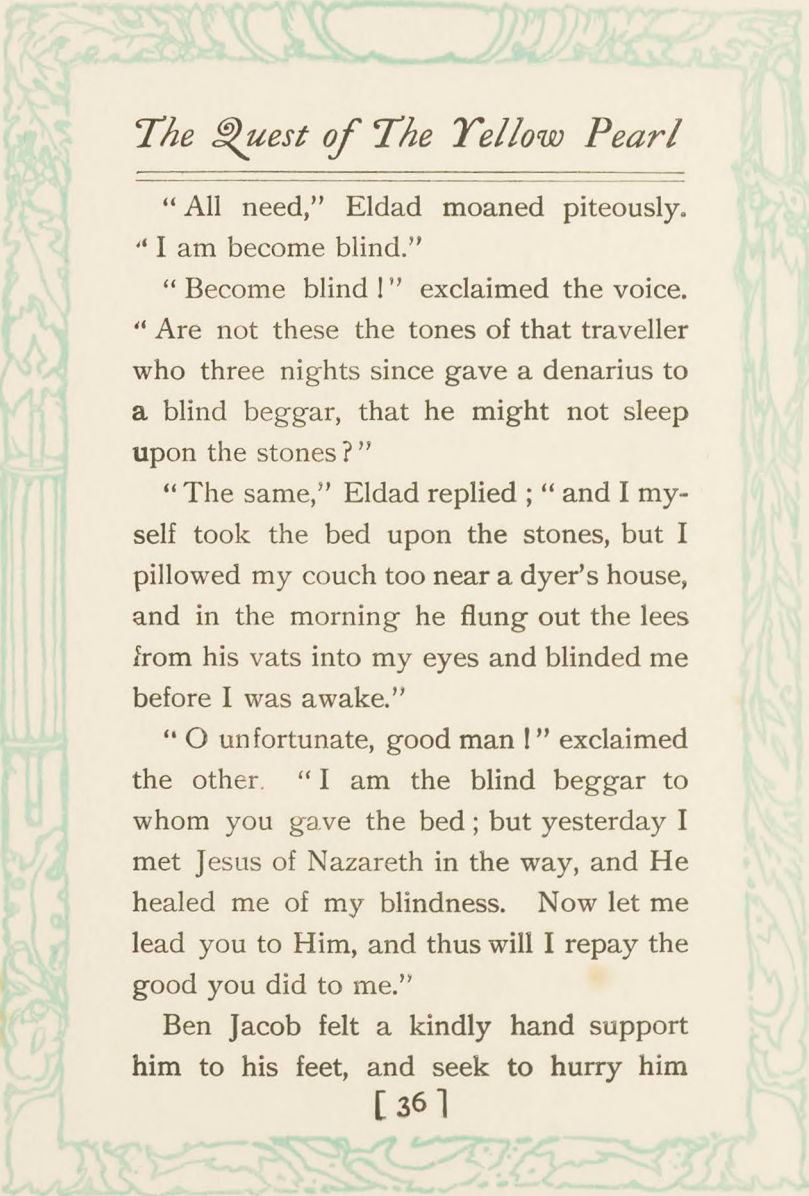
III

TO HIM THAT HATH

BUT, alas for poor Eldad ben Jacob, for when the morrow came he had no eyes with which to see. During the night he had slept in the open, pillow-ing his head against a smooth round stone that jutted out from the wall of a fuller's house, and in the morning he was awak-ened by a great splash and a smarting sen-sation in his eyes. In vain Eldad rubbed them, bound them, bathed them; the sight of them was gone.

Sore, despondent, embittered, blind, he sat three days apart, in hunger, humilia-tion and solitude. Then he lifted his voice and called aloud for help. At last foot-steps turned aside from the crowded way, and a voice called, saying:

"Friend, have you a need?"



The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

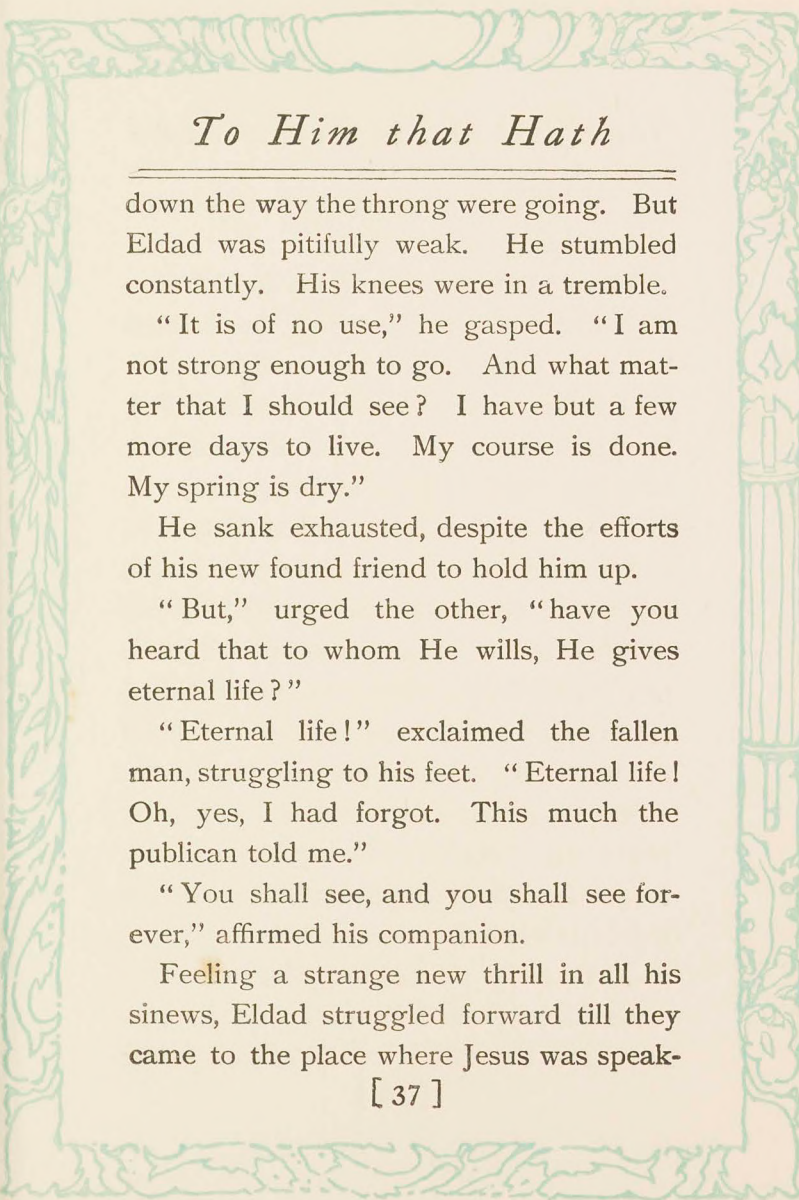
"All need," Eldad moaned piteously.
"I am become blind."

"Become blind!" exclaimed the voice.
"Are not these the tones of that traveller who three nights since gave a denarius to a blind beggar, that he might not sleep upon the stones?"

"The same," Eldad replied; "and I myself took the bed upon the stones, but I pillowed my couch too near a dyer's house, and in the morning he flung out the lees from his vats into my eyes and blinded me before I was awake."

"O unfortunate, good man!" exclaimed the other. "I am the blind beggar to whom you gave the bed; but yesterday I met Jesus of Nazareth in the way, and He healed me of my blindness. Now let me lead you to Him, and thus will I repay the good you did to me."

Ben Jacob felt a kindly hand support him to his feet, and seek to hurry him



To Him that Hath

down the way the throng were going. But Eldad was pitifully weak. He stumbled constantly. His knees were in a tremble.

"It is of no use," he gasped. "I am not strong enough to go. And what matter that I should see? I have but a few more days to live. My course is done. My spring is dry."

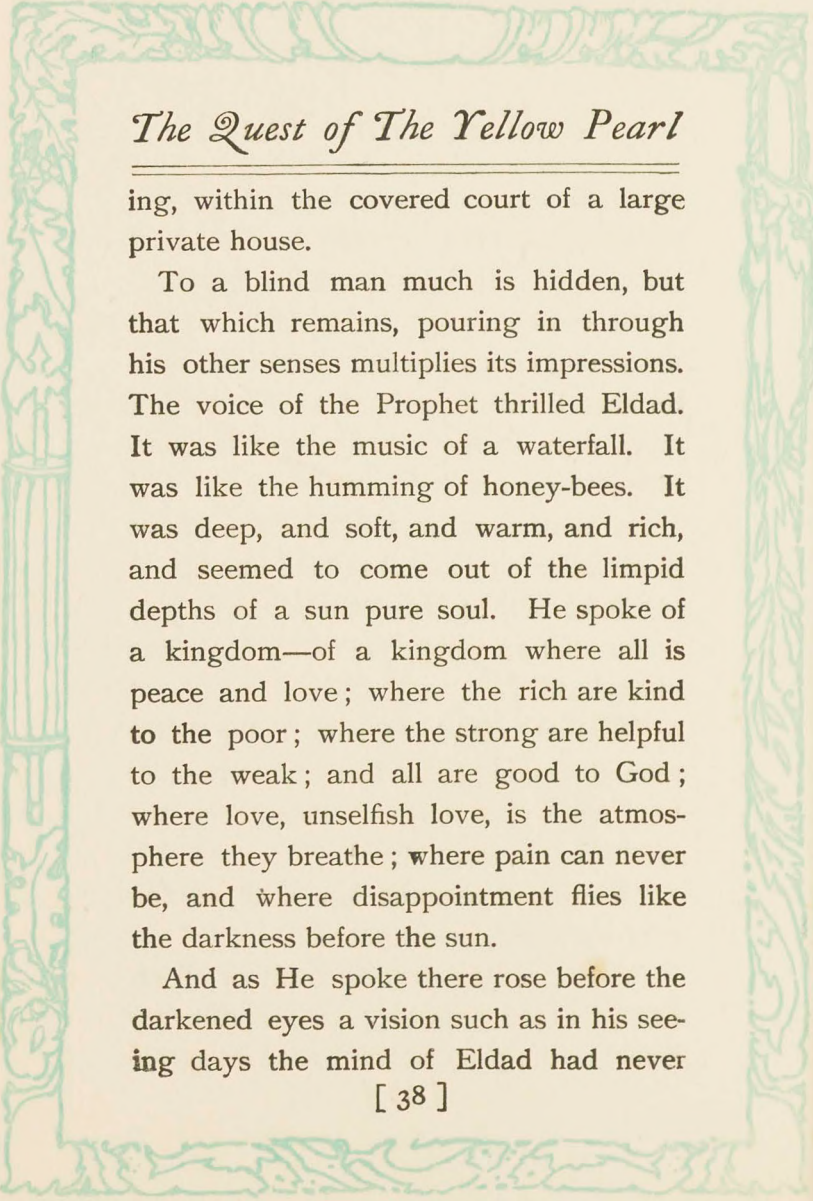
He sank exhausted, despite the efforts of his new found friend to hold him up.

"But," urged the other, "have you heard that to whom He wills, He gives eternal life?"

"Eternal life!" exclaimed the fallen man, struggling to his feet. "Eternal life! Oh, yes, I had forgot. This much the publican told me."

"You shall see, and you shall see forever," affirmed his companion.

Feeling a strange new thrill in all his sinews, Eldad struggled forward till they came to the place where Jesus was speak-

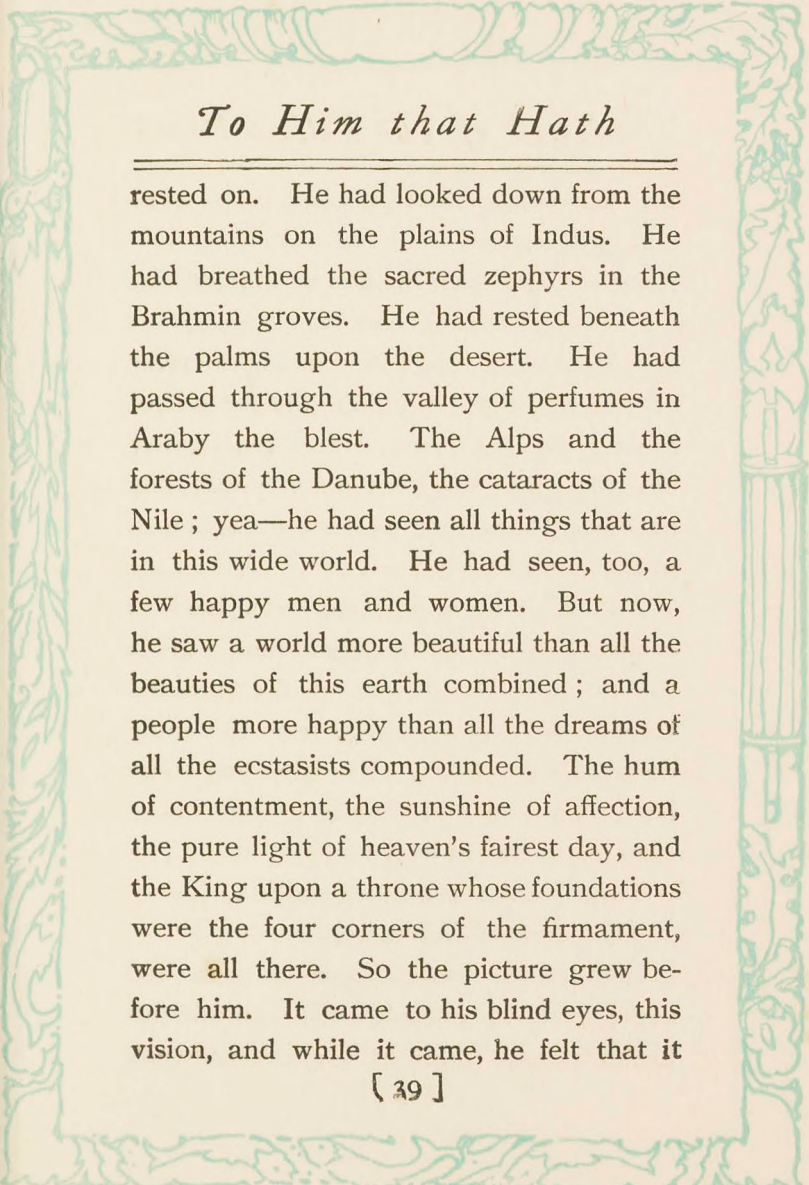


The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

ing, within the covered court of a large private house.

To a blind man much is hidden, but that which remains, pouring in through his other senses multiplies its impressions. The voice of the Prophet thrilled Eldad. It was like the music of a waterfall. It was like the humming of honey-bees. It was deep, and soft, and warm, and rich, and seemed to come out of the limpid depths of a sun pure soul. He spoke of a kingdom—of a kingdom where all is peace and love; where the rich are kind to the poor; where the strong are helpful to the weak; and all are good to God; where love, unselfish love, is the atmosphere they breathe; where pain can never be, and where disappointment flies like the darkness before the sun.

And as He spoke there rose before the darkened eyes a vision such as in his seeing days the mind of Eldad had never



To Him that Hath

rested on. He had looked down from the mountains on the plains of Indus. He had breathed the sacred zephyrs in the Brahmin groves. He had rested beneath the palms upon the desert. He had passed through the valley of perfumes in Araby the blest. The Alps and the forests of the Danube, the cataracts of the Nile ; yea—he had seen all things that are in this wide world. He had seen, too, a few happy men and women. But now, he saw a world more beautiful than all the beauties of this earth combined ; and a people more happy than all the dreams of all the ecstasists compounded. The hum of contentment, the sunshine of affection, the pure light of heaven's fairest day, and the King upon a throne whose foundations were the four corners of the firmament, were all there. So the picture grew before him. It came to his blind eyes, this vision, and while it came, he felt that it

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

was his own—it was his home. It was to this land he had come in his journeyings. His eyes had been blinded to the hot barren earth, and they had been opened to this paradise of God wherein was the river of life flowing softly like the waters of Siloam, and the flowers of eternal beauty blooming, and the fountain of youth was plashing its waters of undying strength in his inmost heart.

And then he seemed to come back to earth again, back to Capernaum, and to the throng. But it was not the same old Capernaum; and he was not the same dust-laden traveller. His vision had come back with him and he was as one whose citizenship was in heaven.

Then Jesus turned and spoke to Eldad
“Wayfarer! What wouldst thou?”

Eldad was thinking swiftly. He had come to have a strange all-powerful faith in this Prophet. He believed he could ask

To Him that Hath

anything he would and it would be given him. And what should he ask? His wealth? No. He had rather the man had his son, and the poor their bread, and the boy the consolation of his dying father. The sight of his eyes, then? And, yet, no, for now he had gained the sight of his soul. The yellow pearl? Nor that either, for this vision of a new heaven and a new earth that had come to him had a finer sheen than any pearl. Though poor, dust-laden, hungry, blind, he was in ecstasy. There was naught that any man could do for him, so he answered :

“Nothing, Lord, save to be with Thee in Thy kingdom.”

And Jesus spoke to him joyously :

“Blessed art thou who in thy blindness hast come to light. Thou hast rightly answered. Having chosen first the kingdom, all other things shall be added unto

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

thee. Because thou hast given thou shalt have wherewith to give. Because thou hast seen, thou shalt see, and seeing thou shalt see forever."

Suddenly Eldad's eyes were opened, and before him stood a wondrous man of more noble mien than any he had ever looked upon. Instinctively Eldad looked for the jewel on His brow. He saw, however, no golden chaplet upon the temples, but there did sit a radiance on His brow, which was greater than the sheen of many pearls, and softer and more elusive, yet far more glorious.

But hardly had Eldad's eyes become accustomed to the light than a messenger appeared, elbowing his way through the crowd, and said:

"Master, the Centurion whose servant you healed yesterday, is here and wishes to speak with you."

By a sign Jesus bade them bring him in.

To Him that Hath

The crowds murmured. Eldad heard one say: "He is a noble Roman. He himself built our synagogue anew since he came among us." And he heard another ask: "Have you heard of his wonderful, heart-shaped pearl, as large as a hen's egg, that turns all colours? It was given to him by his general for heroism in battle. A money-lender stole it from him, but he has lately recovered it."

Eldad felt his heart go strange at the mention of the pearl.

But the crowd was making way, and the Centurion appeared, looking very brave in his full suit of armour. It gave Eldad no start to see that it was his old friend, the Centurion, whom he had followed from Britain to Gaul and then to Rome, for he had instantly suspected as much.

The Centurion dropped upon his knee before the Prophet, and taking from his wallet a jewel set in a pendant of gold, he

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

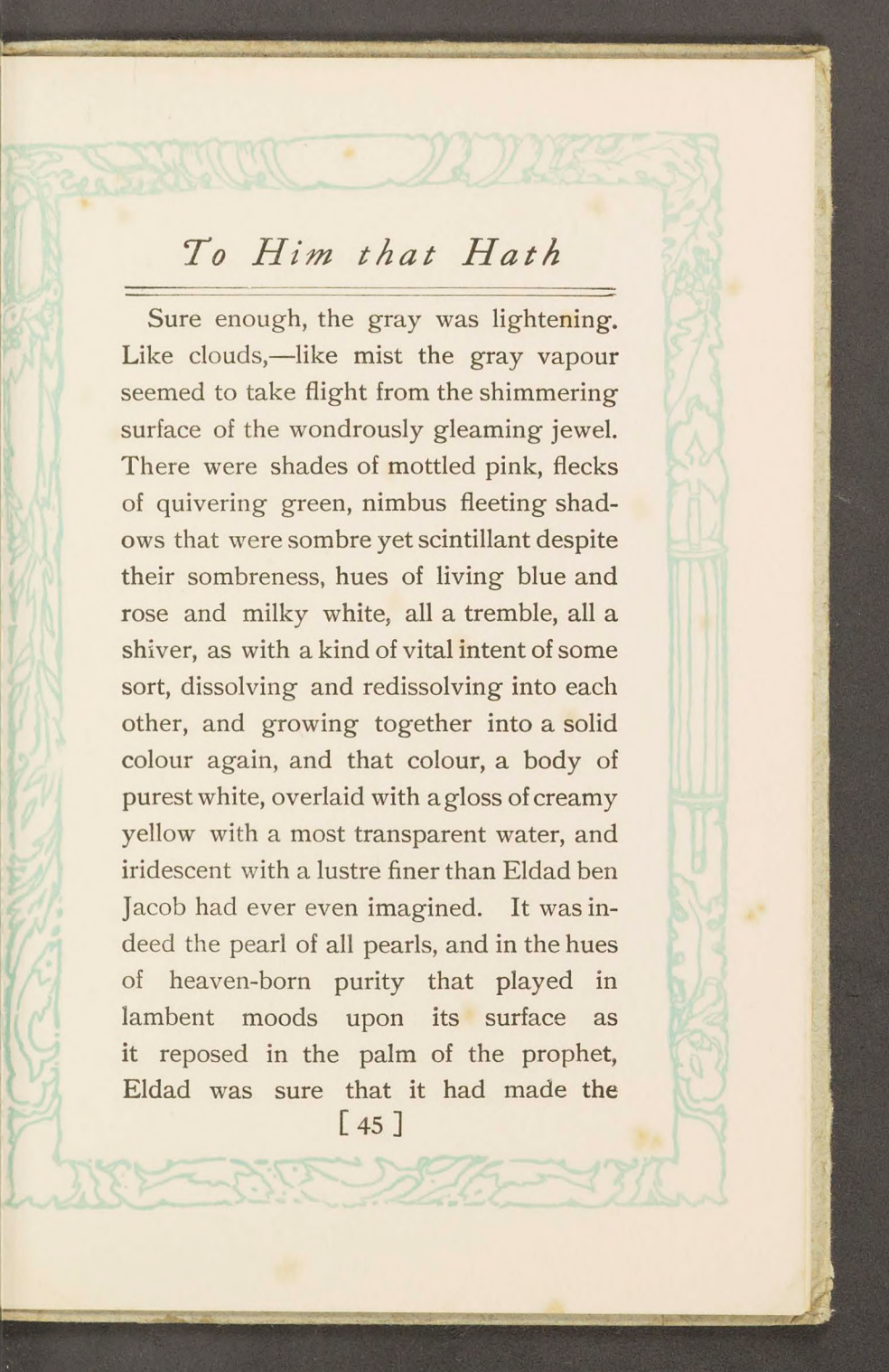
held it for a moment in his hand as with his strong fingers he twisted the golden circlet from the jewel, a great, heart-shaped pearl of a peculiar cloud-cast gray, its satiny surface gleaming with a thousand iridescences.

"The finest pearl, Master, in all the world," he said to Jesus. "For you!" he added, offering it.

Jesus extended His hand and, without touching it with the fingers, allowed it to lie in His open palm, uplifted before all. It lay there, gray, yet beauty tinted, mottled touches of subtle colouring playing over it as it quivered with the coursing of the blood in the hand that held it. A moment the people looked, and then murmured at its beauty.

"Look! It changes colour!" whispered one, loudly.

No one need tell Eldad ben Jacob to look. His eyes were riveted upon it.



To Him that Hath

Sure enough, the gray was lightening. Like clouds,—like mist the gray vapour seemed to take flight from the shimmering surface of the wondrously gleaming jewel. There were shades of mottled pink, flecks of quivering green, nimbus fleeting shadows that were sombre yet scintillant despite their sombreness, hues of living blue and rose and milky white, all a tremble, all a shiver, as with a kind of vital intent of some sort, dissolving and redissolving into each other, and growing together into a solid colour again, and that colour, a body of purest white, overlaid with a gloss of creamy yellow with a most transparent water, and iridescent with a lustre finer than Eldad ben Jacob had ever even imagined. It was indeed the pearl of all pearls, and in the hues of heaven-born purity that played in lambent moods upon its surface as it reposed in the palm of the prophet, Eldad was sure that it had made the

The Quest of The Yellow Pearl

very highest possible response to environment.

Did the Prophet, standing there so still, His own beautiful eyes delighting in the pearl, read Eldad's mind, or had Levi, the Publican, told him? Or how did He know? Or was it only chance? Anyway He turned with it towards Eldad and offered it before his eyes, saying:

"Eldad ben Jacob, is this the object of thy quest? Take it! It is thine."

Was it strange that Eldad trembled? That his fingers opened, then closed again, as he drew back startled and afraid? lest that other, richer, rarer thing than pearls, which he held within his heart, should take flight if once he reached to touch this lustrous jewel? With loving eyes Eldad looked upon the gem. Then lifting his own glance to the kindly light that glowed down upon him from the face of the Prophet, he answered in simple, childlike faith:

To Him that Hath

"No, Lord ; I have found the pearl of greater price. To obtain that which I have within my heart, I would sell the Roman's gift to Thee, as I have sold all other commoner gems to own this one which once I sought in every land."

For answer the Galilean held up the shining lump of roving colour till it laughed in the sunlight that streamed into the court, then emptied it into the instinctively opening palm of Eldad, saying :

"To him that hath shall be given."



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